06 -20-04

AF/2645

IN THE UNITED STATES
PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
BEFORE THE BOARD OF APPEALS
AND INTERFERENCES

Patent Application

Inventors: **Norman C. Chan**
Case No.: **4366-6**
Serial No.: **09/482,969**   Group Art Unit: **2645**
Filing Date: **12 January 2000**
Examiner: **Olisa Anwah**
Title: **Automatic Greeting For Call Centers**

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Technology Center 2600

Commissioner For Patents
PO Box 1450
Alexandria, VA 22313-1450
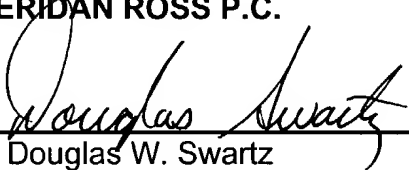
SIR:

FEE FOR FILING A BRIEF IN SUPPORT OF APPEAL

Please charge the amount of $330 to Avaya Inc. Deposit Account No. 50-1602 to cover the fee for filing a brief in triplicate in support of an appeal under 37 CFR 1.17(c).

Triplicate copies of this letter are enclosed. In the event of non-payment or improper payment of a required fee, the Commissioner is authorized to charge or to credit **Deposit Account No. 50-1602** as required to correct the error.

Respectfully submitted,

SHERIDAN ROSS P.C.

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Date:_June 24, 2004_

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

In Re the Application of:)

CHAN)

Serial No.: 09/482,969)

Filed: January 12, 2000)

Atty. File No.: 4366-6)

For: "AUTOMATIC GREETING FOR)
CALL CENTERS")

Group Art Unit: 2645

Examiner: Anwah, Olisa

Appeal No.: _____

APPELLANT'S BRIEF ON APPEAL
(37 CFR §1.192)

Commissioner for Patents and Trademarks
Mail Stop: Appeal Brief - Patents
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Alexandria, VA 22313-13450

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Technology Center 2600

Dear Sir:

This is an appeal under 37 CFR§1.191 to the Board of Patent Appeals and Interferences of

the United States Patent and Trademark Office from the final rejection of claims 1-2, 4-12, and 14-

28 of the above-identified patent application. These claims were indicated as finally rejected in an

Office Action dated March 26, 2004. Three copies of the brief are filed herewith. Please charge

Deposit Account No. 50-1602 for the fee required under 37 CFR §1.17(c). Although Appellant

believes that no other fees are associated with this appeal, please charge any such fees to Deposit

Account No. 50-1602. The structure of the Brief is as follows in accordance with 37 CFR §1.192(c):

I. <u>REAL PARTY IN INTEREST</u>

Avaya Technology Corp. is the owner of the patent application and the real party in interest.

II. <u>RELATED APPEALS AND INTERFERENCES</u>

There are no appeals or interferences related to this patent application.

III. <u>STATUS OF CLAIMS (37 CFR §1.192(c)(1))</u>

The status of the claims is as follows:

    1. Claims canceled: 3 and 13;

    2. Claims withdrawn from consideration but not cancelled: None;

3.   Claims pending: 1-2, 4-12, and 14-28;

4.   Claims allowed: None;

5.   Claims rejected: 1-2, 4-12, and 14-28; and

6.   Claims appealed: 1-2, 4-12, and 14-28 as set forth in Appendix A.

IV. STATUS OF AMENDMENTS (37 CFR §1.192(c)(2))

Appellant filed an Amendment and Response on February 25, 2004, responsive to an Office Action mailed December 1, 2003. A final Office Action was mailed March 26, 2004 and designated by the Examiner as being responsive to the February 25, 2004, Amendment and Response. Appellants have filed no amendments after receipt of the March 26, 2004, final Office Action.

V. SUMMARY OF INVENTION (37 CFR §1.192(c)(3))

One of the many functions that can be performed by a call center is to place outgoing calls to parties from whom a predetermined response is desired. The desired response can be, for example, an answer to a question or the purchase of a product or service. When the outgoing call is answered, a call classifier unit is commonly used at the call center to determine whether a person (i.e., a live party) or a machine (e.g., a telephone answering machine) has answered the call. If the call classifier determines that a live party has answered the call, control of the call is switched over to a live agent at the call center who handles the remainder of the call. If the call classifier determines that the call was not answered by a live party, the call is terminated or alternative action is taken. (Specification at page 1, lines 10-23.)

The call classifier unit usually processes the first audible signal that is received over the telephone line after the call has been answered to make its determination. For example, a person

answering a telephone will typically speak the word "hello" into the receiver and then wait for a response. The call classifier will process the "hello" signal while the called party waits. Because the processing performed by the call classifier unit generally takes a finite amount of time to perform (e.g., a few seconds), the called party normally hears silence on the line while he is waiting for a response. When faced with this awkward situation, a called party will often misinterpret the call and hang up thinking that, for example, an error has occurred or a trick is being played. The call center must then reinitiate the call or reschedule it for a later time. As can be appreciated, such occurrences can degrade overall call center performance. (*Id.* at page 1, line 24, to page 2, line 13.)

The present invention is directed generally to the playing of a message, namely a prerecorded personal greeting, during processing of the initial or first audible signal detected during a call. (*Id.* at page 2, lines 19-24) The prerecorded message is in the voice of the agent assigned to service the outgoing call. (*Id.* at page 6, lines 8-16.) Not only does the playing of the greeting during processing reduce the frequency of hang ups by callees but also the use of a prerecorded greeting in the voice of the agent lightens the burden on the agent assigned to handle the call as he/she does not have to repeat the same greeting for every call placed (Specification at page 3, lines 1-6). Playing the message can provide increased agent efficiency as the agent is not required to waste time making appropriate greetings to the called party and can also reduce called party confusion and frustration from the playing of an initial generic greeting recorded in the voice of someone other than the agent followed by a second greeting in the voice of the agent. (*Id.*)

With specific reference to the claims, independent claim 1 is directed to a method for managing outgoing calls from a call center, such as an outbound or predictive dialer, to selected third party destinations. The method includes the steps of:

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(a) initiating a call to a first party from the call center via a communication medium (Fig. 2, step 100) wherein, before the call is answered, a first agent of the call center has been selected to service the call (Specification at page 7, line 26, to page 8, line 11);

(b) after the call is initiated, monitoring the communication medium for signals received from the called location associated with the first party (Fig. 2, step 102);

(c) detecting an initial audible signal received from the called location via the communication medium (the initial audible signal being the first signal detected after the call is answered) (Fig. 2, step 104);

(d) initiating processing of the initial audible signal in a call classifier to determine a characteristic of the initial audible signal, which processing includes analyzing whether the initial audible signal was generated by a live party (Specification at page 6, lines 17-26, page 8, line 27, to page 9, line 25); and

(e) while the call classifier is processing the initial audible signal, playing a prerecorded greeting in the voice of the first agent over the communication medium during the call. (*Id.* at page 6, lines 8-16, page 9, lines 3-14, and Fig. 2, step 108 and Fig. 3, step 110)

Independent claim 8 is also directed to a method for use by call centers in managing an outgoing call. The method includes the steps of:

(a) placing an outgoing call from a call center to a remote party location over a communication network (Fig. 2, step 100) wherein, before the outgoing call is placed, a first call center agent has been selected to handle the outgoing call when the call is answered by a live party (Specification at page 7, line 26, to page 8, line 11);

(b) processing an initially detected signal received from the remote party location to determine a source type of the initially detected signal (Fig. 2, step 102);

(c) playing a prerecorded greeting in the voice of the first agent to the remote party location during the processing step (*Id.* at page 6, lines 8-16; page 9, lines 3-14, and Fig. 2, step 108 and Fig. 3, step 110); and

(d) after the prerecorded greeting has ended, establishing a talk path between the first agent and the remote party location when it is determined that the initial signal is a voice signal that was generated by a live party during the call (Specification at page 9, line 15, to page 10, line 2).

Independent claim 15 is directed to a call center including:

(a) a call processing unit (Fig. 1, item 16) operable to place a call to a remote party location via a communication network (Specification at page 4, lines 11-15) wherein, before the call is placed, a first agent is assigned to service the call if the call is answered by a live party (Specification at page 7, line 26, to page 8, line 11);

(b) a call classifier unit (Fig. 1, item 18) operable to determine when the call is answered, detect an audible signal from the remote party location and analyze a first detected signal received from the remote party location to determine whether the first detected signal originated from the live party during the call (Specification at page 4, lines 19-26);

(c) a message playback unit (Fig. 1, item 20) operable to play back a prerecorded message in the voice of the first agent to the remote party location while the call classifier unit is analyzing the first detected signal (Specification at page 5, lines 9-19, and page 6, lines 8-16); and

(d) a switch unit (Fig. 1, items 12 and 16) operable to establish a talk path between a local agent position and the remote party location when it is determined by the call classifier unit that the first detected signal originated from the live party during the call (Specification at page 5, lines 2-8).

In the above claims, the prerecorded greeting is played during the time period when the call classifier is processing the initial detected or audible signal (*Id.* at page 5, line 9, to page 6, line 19). The selection of the appropriate prerecorded greeting is made possible by selecting, before the call is placed and/or answered, the first agent of the call center to service the call (Specification at page 7, line 26, to page 8, line 11). The analysis whether the initial audible signal was generated by a live party is the initial such analysis made during the call (Fig. 2, Specification at page 9, line 3 to page 10, line 2).

Independent Claim 8 and dependent Claims 2 and 16 further require the prerecorded message to be played after receipt of the initial audible signal from the answering party and in response to the detection of a period of silence. (Specification at page 4, lines 19-26; page 5, line 9 - page 6, line 19; page 9, lines 3-14; and Fig. 2, step 108 and Fig. 3, step 110.)

Dependent Claims 26-28 are directed generally to a pool of multiple agents associated with the call center. (Specification at page 3, lines 21-22, and Fig. 1, item 22) Each agent in the pool of agents has a corresponding prerecorded greeting recorded in the respective agents' own voice. When an agent is selected to service a call, the agent's corresponding prerecorded greeting is played during call classification. (Specification at page 6, lines 8-16.)

VI. ISSUES (37 CFR §1.192(c)(4))

A.   Whether Claims 1-2, 4-12, and 14-28 are unpatentable over Peltz (U.S. 6,546,097) combined with Sassin et al. (U.S. 6,449,260) in further view of Szlam (U.S. 5,511,112)?

VII. GROUPING OF CLAIMS (37 CFR §1.192(c)(5))

A.   Claims 1, 4-7, 15, and 17-23 stand and fall together.

B.   Claims 2, 8-12, 14, 16, and 24 stand and fall together.

C.   Claims 26-28 stand and fall together.

VIII. SECTION 103 STANDARD FOR PATENTABILITY

The Examiner has rejected all of the pending claims under 35 U.S.C. § 103 which provides in relevant part:

> A patent may not be obtained though the invention is not identically disclosed or described as set forth in section 102 of this title, if the differences between the subject matter sought to be patented and the prior art are such that the subject matter as a whole would have been obvious at the time the invention was made to a person having ordinary skill in the art to which said subject matter pertains. Patentability shall not be negatived by the manner in which the invention was made.

35 U.S.C. § 103 (1984).

"A prima facie case of obviousness is established [by an examiner] when the teachings from the prior art itself would appear to have suggested the claimed subject matter to a person of ordinary skill in the art." In re Rijckaert, 28 USPQ2d (BNA) 1955, 1956. (quoting In re Bell, 26 USPQ2d (BNA) 1529, 1531 (Fed. Cir. 1993). Specifically, there must be some reason, suggestion, motivation, or incentive in the prior art references to combine the various teachings in a manner which defines the claimed combination. In re Fine, 5 USPQ2d (BNA) 1596, 1599 (Fed. Cir. 1988).

In the absence of this reason, suggestion, motivation, or incentive to combine the teachings of the prior art in the manner set forth in the claimed invention, the claimed combination cannot be deemed to be obvious. In re Fritch, 23 USPQ2d (BNA) 1780, 1783 (Fed. Cir. 1992).

A prima facie case of obviousness can be rebutted by a patent applicant based upon the presentation of evidence and/or arguments as to why a prima facie case does not exist. Id. Arguments which may be persuasive to rebut an alleged prima facie case of obviousness include without limitation that: (1) the proposed combination does not in fact disclose or suggest all of the limitations present in a given claim (e.g., all claim elements are not disclosed by the combination asserted by the examiner), In re Rijckaert, 28 USPQ2d (BNA) at 1957; (2) there would be no motivation to combine the teachings in the manner suggested by the examiner since the problem confronted by the patent applicant differed from those addressed in the particular prior art teachings, In re Fine, 5 USPQ2d (BNA) at 1599; (3) the prior art actually teaches away from the proposed combination of prior art references suggested by the examiner, Id.; Ashland Oil, Inc. v. Delta Resins & Refractories, Inc., 227 USPQ (BNA) 657, 666-67; and (4) the examiner has used impermissible hindsight by using the patent applicant's specification as a blueprint to reconstruct the claimed invention from the references, In re Fritch, 23 USPQ2d (BNA) at 1784.

"After evidence or argument is submitted by the applicant in response [to the examiner's proffered prima facie case], patentability is determined on the totality of the record, by a preponderance of evidence with due consideration to persuasiveness of argument." In re Oetiker, 24 USPQ2d (BNA) 1443, 1444 (Fed. Cir. 1992). That is, all "facts" which are presented are relevant to the obviousness inquiry and must be considered in judging the patentability of the claimed invention. Ashland Oil, 227 USPQ (BNA) at 664.

IX. ARGUMENTS - REJECTIONS UNDER 35 U.S.C. SECTION 103

B.   Rejection of Claims 1-2, 4-12, and 14-25 Under 35 U.S.C. §103 in View of the Peltz, Sassin et al., and Szlam Patents

The Examiner rejected Claims 1-2, 4-12, and 14-28 under 35 U.S.C. §103 as being obvious in view of the Peltz, Sassin, and Szlam Patents.

Peltz Teaches Away from Playing a Prerecorded Message in the Voice of the Servicing Agent During Classification of the Initially Detected Audible Signal - Claims 1-2, 4-12, and 14-25 (Claim Groups A-C).

Peltz, the primary reference, is directed to an automatic call distribution system that includes an automatic call distributor, an answer detector, and an introductory signal generator. The signal generator generates introductory signals to be sent towards a called party while the answer detector employed by the automatic call distribution center is waiting for an audible response from the answering party. When a call that is dialed to the called party by the automatic call distribution system is answered by an external telephonic unit of the called party, the automatic call distribution system couples an answer detector to the call. The answer detector of the automatic call distribution system monitors the call for the presence of the called party while concomitantly sending a generated and coupled introductory signal towards the called party to be heard by the called party. The generated introductory signal simulates background noise to encourage the answering party to voice a greeting. When the called party makes an audible response, the answer detector then detects the presence and type of the called party for the purpose of routing or terminating the call.

Peltz teaches away from the present invention's use of a nonrepeating or discontinuous greeting, particularly a greeting in the voice of the agent who will be servicing the answered call.

At col, 2, lines 30-42, Peltz states:

> If the called party hears this generated introductory signal instead of a quiet signal, the called party will be more likely to believe that the call was of human origin and that the calling party did not abandon the call. Therefore, the called party is more likely to stay on the line in response to the call (instead of terminating the call) and to make an oral response, thus allowing the answer detector to detect the presence of the called party and allowing the automatic call distributor to route the call to an agent. *The more similar to that this introductory signal is to common background noise, the more effective the introductory signal will be in causing the called party to remain on the line and to make an oral response.*

(Emphasis supplied.)

At col. 4, lines 39-59, Peltz states:

> The introductory signals that are generated by the introductory signal generator 42 would preferably be, but need not be, a simulation of room background noise that is commonly heard by a party to a conversation through the other party's telephone. The method of signal generation employed by the introductory signal generator 42 could be accomplished by a pseudo-random noise generator, but it need not be. The introductory signal may also be generated through the reproduction or other use of any *repeating or continuous* recorded signal on any recording media, such as a tape loop or other media. It may be generated through the use of one or more processors. The specific signals generated by the introductory signal generator 42 need not be identical for each outdialed call. *The more closely the introductory signal simulates common background noise, the more likely the signal is to succeed in its ability to keep the called party on the line of his or her external telephonic unit 32.* Introductory signals may be sent other than those simulating common background noise, but the introductory signal generator 40 will preferably be configured to generate an introductory signal which simulates background noise.

(Emphasis supplied.) Peltz clearly teaches to one of ordinary skill in the art that the introductory signal must be repeating or continuous because the "more closely the introductory signal simulates common background noise, the more likely the signal is to succeed in its ability to keep the called party on the line."

Contrary to this clear teaching of Peltz, the claimed invention requires the use of a personal greeting in the voice of the servicing agent. Such a personal greeting is nonrepeating and discontinuous. Contrary to Peltz' clear teaching, Applicant has found that a personal greeting in the

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voice of the servicing agent not only has a higher likelihood of keeping the called party on the line but also offers the further benefit, which is substantial, of decreasing the amount of time the agent requires to service the call.

Peltz Teaches Away From Selecting the Servicing Agent Before the Call is Answered or Placed - Claims 1-2, 4-12, and 14-25 (Claim Groups A-C).

Peltz teaches that, when the outbound call is answered by a live party, the call is "*then* routed by the automatic call distribution system to an agent at an internal telephonic unit of the automatic call distribution system." (Col. 1, lines 37-44; *see also* col. 2, lines 34-39.) Peltz thus teaches away from the automatic call distribution system selecting the agent *before* the call is placed or answered, as required by the rejected claims.

Peltz Teaches Initiating Play of the Introductory Signal Before Not After Receipt of the Initial Audible Signal - Claims 2, 8-12, 14, 16, and 24 (Claim Group B).

Independent Claim 8 requires the prerecorded greeting to be played in response to the detection of a period of silence after receipt of the initial signal from the remote party location. The signal is received after the call is answered (Claim 8) and is therefore an audible signal received from the party answering the call and is not a (call connection) signal generated by the answering party's phone indicating that the call has been answered. Claim 8 requires that the introductory signal be played while the initial audible signal is being processed to determine the source type of the signal (*e.g.,* whether the signal is from a live party or answering machine.) Dependent Claims 2 and 16 include similar limitations.

In contrast, Peltz teaches playing the introductory signal in response to the call being answered (or the receipt of a call connection signal generated by the answering party's phone indicating that the call has been answered (*see* col. 3, lines 58-65, and col. 4, lines 1-14) and *not* in

-12-

response to the detection of a period of silence after receipt of the initial audible signal generated from the party answering the call. The reason Peltz teaches away from the present invention's approach is because it targets a different problem at a different point during the call duration. At col. 1, line 54 - col. 2, line 14, Peltz notes that some called parties answering a call do not automatically speak but may listen first to the phone for any signals being sent from the calling party. The called party, hearing a dead line, may hang up without speaking, which will terminate the call before the answer detector can detect that the called party is actually on the line. For this reason, Peltz states at col. 2, lines 26-42:

> These and other needs in the art are met by providing an automatic call distribution system that includes an introductory signal that is generated by the system and sent towards the called party *while an answer detector is monitoring the called party for a response*. If the called party hears this generated introductory signal instead of a quiet signal, the called party will be more likely to believe that the call was of human origin and that the calling party did not abandon the call. Therefore, the called party is more likely to stay on the line in response to the call (instead of terminating the call) and to make an oral response, thus allowing the answer detector to detect the presence of the called party and allowing the automatic call distributor to route the call to an agent. The more similar that this introductory signal is to common background noise, the more effective the introductory signal will be in causing the called party to remain on the line and to make an oral response.

(Emphasis supplied.)

At col. 4, lines 29-38, Peltz further states:

> The introductory signal generation and transmission may, but need not be, concurrent. It is sufficient for this introductory signal to be generated, coupled, and transmitted to the external telephonic unit 32 in any manner or sequence readily understood by those in the art so long as a called party, or, a device employed by the called party, would be able to perceive a generated introductory signal, instead of merely the prior art quiet signal, *during the phase of the call in which the answer detector 40 is monitoring the call for a response.*

(Emphasis supplied.)

At col. 5, lines 5-30, Peltz further states:

> *A called party, upon picking up the telephone handset, may listen for signals that are sent from a calling party before giving a response to the call. While this called party is on the line, the introductory signal is being sent towards the called party.* In the prior art systems, the called party, upon hearing a quiet signal, may suspect or believe that the call has been abandoned, or that the line is "dead", or that the call was of non-human origin, such as a telemarketing call. The called party, under these prior art systems, may terminate the call without making an oral response. *Under the present invention, the called party, upon hearing the generated introductory signal, will be more likely to believe that the call is still connected and that the call is of human origin, and thus not terminate the call. If the called party in this latter belief makes a response that indicates to the answer detector 40 that a called party is present, such as an oral response, then the answer detector 40 will be able to detect the presence of a called party at the external telephonic unit 332,* and thus route the call through the automatic call distributor 20 to an internal telephonic unit 50, for connection with an agent. Thus, the answer detector 40 used in this automatic call distribution system 10 will be more likely to detect the presence of called parties that, before giving a response, listen to signals placed from calling parties.

(Emphasis supplied.)

Accordingly, Peltz teaches away from the claimed invention's playing of the prerecorded message in response to detecting a period of silence after receipt of the initial audible signal.

Peltz Fails to Teach and Suggest the Use of Multiple Prerecorded Messages in the Voices of Various Agents - Claims 26-28 (Group C).

Claims 26-28 are directed generally to each agent in a pool of agents having a corresponding prerecorded personal greeting recorded in the respective agents' own voice. When an agent is selected to service a call, the corresponding personal greeting in the selected agent's voice is selected and played sometime after the call is answered. Peltz fails to teach the use of a prerecorded message, whether or not in the agent's own voice, let alone the use of a corresponding prerecorded personal greeting when each agent in the pool of agents is selected to service a call.

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The Secondary References, Sassin and Szlam, Fail to Overcome the Deficiencies of Peltz.

While acknowledging that Peltz fails to disclose (i) selecting, before the call is answered, the first agent to service the call and (ii) the playing of a prerecorded greeting in the voice of the first agent, the Examiner cites Sassin for the former teaching and Szlam for the latter. Sassin is directed to an automatic call distribution system that uses a number of H.323 compatible devices. At col. 9, line 23 to col. 10, line 2, and Figures 7 and 8, Sassin teaches connecting an outbound call to a customer after the agent to service the call, if answered, has been selected. Sassin does not teach or suggest playing a prerecorded message (in the voice of an agent) to the customer. Szlam is directed to a call center in which various prerecorded messages (in the voice of a selected agent) can be played to a customer after the call is answered by the customer. These messages include "on hold" messages (col. 2, lines 35-50, and col. 8, lines 27-58) and "wrap-up" statements (col. 2, lines 51-59, and col. 9, lines 22-64). Szlam teaches or suggests playing the prerecorded messages to the answering party *only after* and *not* before a call classifier has determined that a live party has answered the call.

Contrary to the Examiner's statements, it would not be obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art to combine Peltz with either or both of these references to realize the claimed invention. As noted previously, Peltz teaches that the more closely the introductory signal simulates common background noise, the more likely the signal is to succeed in its ability to keep the called party on the line of his or her external telephonic unit. *Peltz thus explicitly teaches away from playing a message recorded in the voice of a selected agent.* In fact, Peltz does not teach selecting the agent to service the call before the call is placed or answered, which is required to play a recorded message in the voice of a selected agent during initial signal processing. Moreover, the messages are played by Peltz and Szlam for different reasons. In Peltz, the message is played to encourage a live party

to voice a greeting, thereby assisting signal processing for the purposes of determining whether a live party answered the call. In Szlam, the messages are played to enhance agent efficiency in servicing a call long after the call classifier has already identified successfully a live party answer.
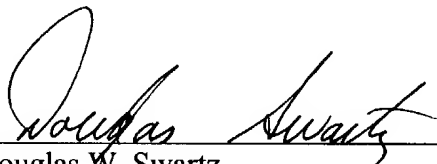
In short, the Examiner has used nothing more than hindsight obviousness to combine selected teachings of various references to realize the present invention, even though there is no motivation or suggestion to one of ordinary skill in the art to so combine the references. Although hindsight would suggest that Peltz is the obvious place to start, "obvious to try" is not the standard. *See Ecolochem Inc. v. Southern California Edison Co.*, Fed. Cir., 227 F.3d 1361 (Fed. Cir. 2000) (impermissible hindsight obviousness used to invalidate claims where the combined prior art references taught away from the claimed demineralization and deoxygenation process).

X. CONCLUSION

Based upon the foregoing, Appellant respectfully requests the Board to reverse the Examiner's §103 rejection of all pending claims and to pass the above-identified patent application to issuance.

Respectfully submitted,

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Date:___June 24, 2004___

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APPENDIX   A

CLAIMS ON APPEAL

1.   A method for use in managing outgoing calls in a call center, comprising:

initiating a call to a first party from the call center via a communication medium, wherein, before the call is answered, a first agent of the call center has been selected to

5   service the call;

monitoring said communication medium for signals received from a called location associated with said first party after said step of initiating a call;

detecting an initial audible signal received from the first party location via said communication medium, wherein the initial audible signal is the first signal detected on

10   the communication medium after said call is answered;

initiating processing of said initial audible signal in a call classifier to determine a characteristic of said initial audible signal, said step of initiating processing includes initiating processing that will analyze whether said initial audible signal was generated by a live party during the call; and

15   playing a prerecorded greeting over said communication medium during said call, said prerecorded greeting being played during a time period when said call classifier is processing said initial audible signal, wherein the analysis whether said initial audible signal was generated by a live party is the initial call classifier analysis made during the call, and wherein the prerecorded greeting is recorded in the voice of the first agent .

2.   The method claimed in claim 1, wherein:

said step of playing a prerecorded greeting includes detecting a period of silence on said communication medium and initiating playback of said prerecorded greeting in response thereto.

3.   (Canceled)

4.   The method claimed in claim 3, further comprising the step of:

when said call classifier determines that said initial audible signal was generated by a live party at the first party location, establishing a talk path between the live party and an agent at the call center after playback of said prerecorded greeting has ended.

-1-

5.   The method claimed in claim 3, further comprising the step of:

when said call classifier determines that said initial audible signal was not generated by a live party at the first party location, terminating the call.

6.   The method claimed in claim 1, wherein:

said communication medium includes a local loop associated with a telephone network.

7.   The method claimed in claim 1, wherein:

said step of initiating a call includes dialing a telephone number associated with said first party and said initial audible signal is received from the location associated with the first party during said call.

8.   A method for use in managing an outgoing call comprising the steps of:

placing an outgoing call from a call center to a remote party location over a communication network, wherein, before the placing step, a first agent of the call center has been selected to handle the outgoing call when the call is answered by a live party at
5   the remote party location;

processing an initial signal received from said remote party location during said call to determine a source type of said initial signal, wherein the processed signal is the first signal detected from the remote party location after said call is answered;

playing a prerecorded greeting to said remote party location during said step of
10   processing, wherein said step of playing a prerecorded message includes detecting a period of silence after receipt of said initial signal and initiating playback of said prerecorded greeting in response thereto, and wherein the prerecorded greeting is recorded in the voice of the first agent; and

after said prerecorded greeting has ended, establishing a talk path between the
15   first agent and the remote party location when it is determined that said initial signal is a voice signal that was generated by the live party during the call, and wherein the

determination whether the initial signal is a voice signal that was generated by the live party during the call is the initial such determination made during the call.

9.   The method claimed in claim 8, further comprising the step of:

terminating the call when it is determined that said initial signal was not generated by the live party during the call.

10.   The method claimed in claim 8, wherein:

said step of placing an outgoing call includes dialing a telephone number associated with a remote party and said initial signal processed in the processing step is the initial audible signal received during said call.

11.   The method claimed in claim 8, wherein:

said communication network includes a public switched telephone network.

12.   The method claimed in claim 8, wherein:

said step of processing a signal includes using a call classifier to determine whether the initial signal was generated by a live party during the call.

13.   (Canceled)

14.   The method claimed in claim 8, wherein:

said step of establishing a talk path includes passing control of said call to said first agent for a remainder of the call.

15.   A system for use within a call center, comprising:

a call processing unit operable to place a call to a remote party location via a communication network, wherein, before the call is placed, a first agent is assigned to service the call if the call is answered by a live party at the remote party location;

5   a call classifier unit operable to determine when said call is answered, detect an audible signal from the remote party location, and analyze a first detected audible signal

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received from said remote party location to determine whether said first detected audible signal originated from the live party during the call, and wherein the first detected signal is the first signal detected by the call classifier unit after said call is answered;

10   a message playback unit operable to play back a prerecorded message to said remote party location while said call classifier unit is analyzing said first detected audible signal, wherein the prerecorded message is recorded in the voice of the first agent; and

a switch unit operable to establish a talk path between a local agent position and said remote party location when it is determined by said call classifier unit that said first

15   detected audible signal originated from the live party during the call, and wherein the determination whether the first detected audible signal is a voice signal that was generated by the live party during the call is the initial such determination made during the call.

16.   The system claimed in claim 15, wherein:

said message playback unit plays back said prerecorded message in response to detection of a period of silence during said call.

17.   The system claimed in claim 15, wherein:

said external communication network includes a public switched telephone network and said first detected signal is received during said call.

18.   The system claimed in claim 15, wherein:

said external communication network includes at least one of the following: a satellite communication network, an optical fiber communication network, a local area network, a wide area network, a municipal area network, a private branch exchange

5   network, an Internet network, and a terrestrial wireless network.

19.   The system claimed in claim 15, wherein:

said call processing unit includes means for terminating said call when it is determined by said call classifier unit that said first detected signal did not originate from the live party during the call.

20.   The system claimed in claim 15, wherein:

said call processing unit and said switch unit are implemented within a common digital processor.

21.   The system claimed in claim 15, wherein:

said call processing unit and said message playback unit are implemented within a common digital processor.

22.   The system claimed in claim 15, wherein:

said call classifier unit is part of a pool of call classifier units; and

said call processing unit is operable to assign call classifier units from said pool of call classifier units to individuals calls being supported by the call center.

23.   The method claimed in claim 1, wherein the call to the first party is the initial call made by the call center to the first party.

24.   The method claimed in claim 8, wherein the outgoing call to the remote party location is the initial call made to the remote party location.

25.   The system claimed in claim 15, wherein the call to the remote party location is the initial call made by the call center to the remote party location.

26.   The method claimed in claim 1, wherein the first agent is in a pool of multiple agents associated with the call center, wherein the greeting is a personal greeting, and wherein each agent in the pool of agents has a corresponding prerecorded greeting recorded in the respective agents' own voice and further comprising:

5   selecting a second agent, different from the first agent, in the pool of agents to service a second call to a second party location, different from the first party location, over the communication medium; and

playing a second prerecorded greeting corresponding to the second agent during call classification of a second initial audible signal received from the second party

10   location during the second call.

27. The method claimed in claim 8, wherein the first agent is in a pool of multiple agents associated with the call center, wherein the greeting is a personal greeting, and wherein each agent in the pool of agents has a corresponding prerecorded greeting recorded in the respective agents' own voice and further comprising:

selecting a second agent, different from the first agent, in the pool of agents to service a second call to a second party location, different from the remote party location, over the communication network; and

playing a second prerecorded greeting corresponding to the second agent during call classification of a second initial audible signal received from the second party location during the second call.

28. The system claimed in claim 15, wherein the first agent is in a pool of multiple agents associated with the call center, wherein the message is a personal greeting, wherein each agent in the pool of agents has a corresponding prerecorded message recorded in the respective agents' own voice, wherein the call center is operable to select a second agent, different from the first agent, in the pool of agents to service a second call to a second party location, different from the remote party location, over the communication network, and wherein the message playback unit is operable to play back a second prerecorded message, different from the prerecorded message played back to the remote party location, corresponding to the second agent during call classification of a second initial audible signal, different from the initial audible signal from the remote party location, received from the second party location during the second call.

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